

WASHINGTON CLOSE-UP

Scientists Debate Gumshoe Work

By WILLIAM HINES

A subject not officially on the program gripped the attention of many scientists attending the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science here last week. It related to the propriety of undercover intelligence activities in foreign countries in the guise of legitimate scientific research.

A deplorable amount of CIA-type gumshoe work apparently goes on abroad, camouflaged—with varying degrees of authenticity—as anthropological investigation, botanical or zoological field research, geological exploration, and whatnot. The situation has become so notorious overseas that traveling American scientists are worried about their future effectiveness and their rapport with foreign colleagues.

It was probably more than mere coincidence that the AAAS' official magazine, "Science," featured in the issue current at the meeting a lengthy article on the science-vs.-espionage controversy.

The article focused on problems faced by anthropologists, using as its news peg a report of a meeting of the American Anthropological Association a few weeks earlier at Pittsburgh.

The difficulty arising when government snoops invade the scientific field breaks down into three broad areas:

1. Spies, posing as scientists usually perform so ineptly in the scientific role that American science is disgraced thereby.

2. Scientists succumbing to the blandishments and pressures of spy-procurers usually perform so ineptly in the espionage role that their good faith as scientists is shattered.

3. Scientists rebuffing the appeals of the spy-hustlers often find their patriotism called into question, with the implied possibility that they may end up on some

fund-granting agency's blacklist.

The question of scientific funding is a vexing one in this connection, since the vast preponderance of scientific research and study money these days comes from the federal treasury. Not all this money is channeled through agencies which scientists would normally regard as scientifically responsible.

"Research grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, the National Science Foundation and the Smithsonian Institution (are) less suspect abroad than . . . research grants from the U.S. Information (Agency), the CIA and the Defense and State Departments, and . . . most anthropologists would prefer government support from the three first-named agencies," Science said.

The statement was based on findings of a panel of scientists headed by Ralph L. Beals of the University of California (Los Angeles), a former president of the American Anthropological Association. The Beals study was instituted after the "Camelot" fiasco, a purportedly scientific research project in Chile which was unmasked as a psychological warfare exercise, to the horror of the Chilean government. Another was later revealed in the Republic of Colombia.

It seems to be shockingly easy for an anthropologist—for example—to get a "Scientific" grant these days, even after reputable public and private foundations turn him down. Beals' report, quoted in Science, said:

"Some anthropologists, particularly younger anthropologists, who have encountered difficulties securing financing for legitimate research undertakings, have been approached by obscure foundations . . . only to discover later they were expected to provide intelligence information, usually to the CIA . . ."

As it does abroad with false-front "private businesses" (which fool nobody in the countries concerned), the CIA apparently maintains dummy "educational foundations" at home, equipped to disburse money to young scientists—and to do little else.

A Loren Eiseley or a Margaret Mead, loaded with prestige and too busy for cloak-and-dagger foolishness, can thumb his or her nose at these questionable sources of funds. But as long as the academic rule of "publish or perish" hangs over young men and women, the scientific bucket-shops of the "intelligence community" are likely to flourish.

Typical of so much of the ham-handed spy work of U.S. gumshoes, this sort of hanky-panky backfires on the nation whose tax money supports it. A former executive secretary of the Anthropological Association complained to a Senate committee last summer about discourtesy and worse on the part of some anthropologists operating abroad.

Quite frequently, Science magazine noted, U.S. scholars fail to co-operate with fellow scientists in "host" countries, even to the extent of neglecting to send back reports of their work. There may be more than just bad manners involved here, however; there is always the possibility that some spy-master may have slapped a "Top Secret" stamp on the grantee's research, thus preventing his fulfilling a basic nicety of science.

Although no vote was taken or formal consensus reached at the AAAS meeting here last week, there is little doubt where most U.S. scientists stand on the issue of science-vs.-spying. The world image of American science is so good—and of American intelligence work so bad—that the gumshoes should desist before they ruin the former without improving the latter.

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